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News Release ~ Communiqué

Working towards healthy bison herds

OTTAWA, April 21, 1995 - A decision to deal with the issue of bovine tuberculosis and brucellosis in bison herds in Wood Buffalo National Park was announced today by the Honourable Michel Dupuy, Minister of Canadian Heritage.

As part of a five-year program, Parks Canada will fund research on bison ecology to learn more about the effects of predators, disease and habitat change on the population dynamics and sustainability of park bison. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada will continue its disease testing program for livestock. In cooperation with the government of the Northwest Territories, a buffer zone will be maintained to prevent contact between disease-exposed bison in the park and the Mackenzie Bison Sanctuary herd to the north. As well, the risks of disease transmission will be evaluated and specific control strategies will be developed in cooperation with local communities.

Designed to ensure the existence of healthy bison herds and prevent the spread of disease, the program will focus on risk assessment, disease containment and research. The federal government will fund the \$5 million program.

"Through further research, we will ensure that a long-term disease management plan is based on scientific information and sensitive to the international heritage and genetic value of the bison," said Mr. Dupuy. "The federal government will continue to work with other stakeholders to sustain bison populations in northern Canada and prevent the spread of disease to domestic cattle and non-diseased bison."

"We are confident that the buffer zone and surveillance activities will continue to contain these diseases within the park, thereby protecting valuable foreign markets for Canada's cattle and bison producers," said Mr. Ralph Goodale, federal Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

This decision responds to advice from a Federal Environmental Assessment Review Panel and the Northern Bison Management Review Board (NBMB). Both groups acknowledged the complexity of this wildlife issue and the need for more information.

The Wood Buffalo National Park bison herd is the largest free-roaming, self-regulating population of bison in the world.

The federal government's decision on the diseased bison issue addresses the public concern on one of the most difficult and complex wildlife management issues Canada has ever faced, while respecting current fiscal constraints.

Funding for this project was provided for in the February 1995 federal budget and is therefore built into the existing fiscal framework. This initiative is an example of how this government is prioritizing its spending so that it can better serve Canadians by making efficient use of their tax dollars.

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2008-03793/

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